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# Harshita Bhattacharya

*Reweaving the Fashion Ecosystem through  
Empathy and Innovation*

Kaushal Kumar | The CEO Magazine

The fashion industry has always been about expression and change, but it is also an ecosystem shaped by people, livelihoods, and responsibility. As conversations around sustainability, employment, and mindful consumption grow stronger, the need for more grounded, people-first approaches is becoming increasingly evident.

This is the space where Harshita Bhattacharya's work begins to find its meaning, at the intersection of creativity and community, where fashion is not viewed merely as a product or trend but as a system shaped by people, skills, and opportunity.

## Where the Journey Began

Harshita's early years unfolded across Ujjain and Bengaluru, before her academic journey took her to Milan and London for higher education. Moving across geographies exposed her to different cultures, ideas, and ways of thinking, helping her grow not just academically but as a person.

During her time as a student, Harshita found herself drawn to work that connected design with lived realities. Projects focused on social concerns, including domestic violence and the experiences of acid attack survivors, became important turning points. These projects involved directly interacting with survivors, understanding their lived experiences, and translating their stories into fashion narratives that allowed them to feel seen, confident, and beautiful. This work received strong appreciation across universities in Milan and London, but more importantly, it reinforced her belief that design and leadership must carry empathy and purpose.



**Harshita  
Bhattacharya**

Chief Executive Officer  
Akihohito Private Limited (Trading as Silaai)

Exposure during these years extended beyond academia, as she also began engaging professionally across multiple industries and global markets, including India, the UAE, the Netherlands, Italy, and the UK, experiences that shaped her understanding of people, cultures, and market dynamics.

A defining moment in Harshita's journey was receiving the National Women Bravery Excellence Award from government authorities in India for saving a life and for her work towards women. The recognition stayed with her not as an achievement alone, but as a reminder of responsibility.

Alongside her academic and professional path, she has spent over fifteen years as a director of a non-governmental organisation working to reduce fashion waste. The initiative collects fabrics offered to deities in places of worship and transforms them into clothing for people in need, enabling the distribution of more than 500,000 garments across Madhya Pradesh and other parts of India. Working closely at the grassroots level offered her a clear view of the industry's structural challenges, particularly the dual concerns of waste and limited sustainable employment.

Despite global exposure and evolving industry conversations, she observed that students, artisans, tailors, and small boutiques continued to face barriers, even as fast fashion expanded rapidly. This gap gradually shaped her motivation to understand the ecosystem more deeply and to work toward building a solution-driven enterprise. The idea that would eventually take form as her company emerged through years of observation, engagement, and sustained learning.

## The Making of Silaai

Silaai, operating under Akihohito Private Limited, marks Harshita Bhattacharya's entrepreneurial step into the evolving fashion ecosystem. She views herself as a medium rather than the centre of the organisation, envisioning the platform as something built for the community and shaped by the people it serves.

Currently in its pre-market phase, the venture reflects her long-standing engagement with the industry and her intent to build a platform shaped by structure, accessibility, and responsibility. Envisioned as a mobile-first ecosystem, the company is being developed to bring greater transparency and ease to fashion-related services while aligning with the growing shift toward more mindful consumption.

Designed for both urban and emerging markets, it seeks to connect individuals with skilled professionals and encourage more mindful, value-driven choices. At its core, the initiative reflects Harshita's intent to build a business that aligns commercial direction with responsibility and long-term relevance, anchored in a people-first philosophy rooted in empathy, inclusion, and responsibility.

## A Leadership Grounded in Responsibility

Harshita's leadership philosophy has remained rooted in consistency and clarity, shaped by a belief in focusing on what needs to be done, regardless of circumstances. The pandemic, while disruptive for brands and independent boutiques across the fashion ecosystem, reinforced her resolve to work more intentionally towards change.

“LEADERSHIP, TO ME, IS ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY, SERVICE, AND STAYING GROUNDED. IF THE WORK YOU DO CONTRIBUTES POSITIVELY TO SOCIETY AND HELPS PEOPLE GROW, EVERYTHING ELSE EVENTUALLY ALIGNS.”

At the same time, rapid technological shifts brought their own set of challenges, particularly around confidence and adaptability among students and working professionals. In response, she has actively invested her time in mentoring and training individuals, supporting them in securing placements in universities and professional roles. For her, leadership extends beyond organisational goals to enabling people through access to education, skills, and opportunity.

She does not frame her journey through the lens of gender, viewing challenges instead as part of the shared human experience of responsibility and perseverance. What has guided her consistently is the ability to stand her ground, speak up where necessary, and move forward with clarity of intent.

This approach naturally reflects in how she views teams and talent. Her focus remains on nurturing individuals, creating opportunities, and building systems



that support those often underserved by the industry. The larger aim is to cultivate an ecosystem that values people, skills, and long-term growth as much as performance and scale.

Harshita believes, *“Success in 2026, for me, means continuing to stay focused on the work, embracing failures, standing back up when things do not go as planned, and remaining consistent with purpose. Impact, learning, and resilience define success more than milestones alone.”*

#### **The Road Ahead**

Harshita does not believe in chasing trends or trying to stay ahead of them. Her approach is rooted in consistency, observation, and honesty towards her work. She places greater value on understanding people, listening to their experiences, studying markets, and learning through travel and exposure. For her, this organic process of learning shapes perspective far more meaningfully than simply following industry movements. At present, her primary focus remains on building Silaai as an organisation that can create tangible impact within the fashion ecosystem. The initiative is being

shaped to support the community, generate employment, and address the persistent issue of waste, areas she believes require long-term, structural attention. Looking ahead, she envisions the organisation growing into a platform that contributes meaningfully to the industry while opening pathways for people within it. Over the next three to five years, her goal is to see Silaai create sustained opportunities for people. Alongside this, she hopes to nurture young talent and help shape lives through access to opportunity and guidance.

#### **Leading with Purpose and Perspective**

Mentorship, for Harshita Bhattacharya, has always come from close and personal spaces rather than formal structures. Her family has been her strongest source of guidance. From her grandparents, she learned how to build something meaningful with love and care. From her mother, she absorbed humility and the ability to see positives in every situation, while her brothers taught her patience. Her loved ones contributed to her sense of self-confidence, while reinforcing the importance of simplicity and enjoying life beyond work.

Among the influences that shaped her most deeply, her mother remains her greatest inspiration. Her strength, grounded nature, and resilience have played a defining role in shaping Harshita's values and her approach to both life and leadership. Offering advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs, she notes,

**“IT IS NEVER ABOUT WHAT SOCIETY TELLS YOU TO DO. UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN BODY, YOUR OWN AMBITIONS, AND YOUR OWN PACE. CREATE TIME FOR YOURSELF AND PURSUE YOUR GOALS WITH INTENTION, FOCUS, AND ENTHUSIASM. GENDER DOES NOT DEFINE LEADERS; YOUR WORK DOES. SMILE, WORK HARD, LOOK FOR POSITIVES, AND KEEP MOVING FORWARD WHILE ENJOYING YOUR LIFE.”**